

Influence of Child-Focused and Parent-Focused Interventions  
on Family Functioning of Anxious Children

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Inleverdatum: Oktober 2014

### Abstract

**Objective.** This study examined (1) whether family functioning of high-anxious children ( $n = 122$ ) receiving an intervention would improve more, than family functioning of high-anxious children receiving no intervention ( $n = 50$ ); (2) whether family functioning of high-anxious children receiving a parent-focused intervention ( $n = 68$ ) would improve more, than family functioning of high-anxious children receiving a child-focused intervention ( $n = 54$ ); (3) whether family functioning of median-anxious children ( $n = 72$ ) would be better at all measurements, than family functioning of high-anxious children ( $n = 50$ ).

**Method.** The participants consisted of children aged 8 – 13, who, based on screening were labelled as high-anxious ( $n=172$ ) or median-anxious ( $n = 72$ ). The high-anxious children were randomly assigned to a child-focused, parent-focused or non-intervention group. The Family System Test (FAST), a spatial placement technique, was used to determine cohesion, hierarchy and family structure of the participants, at pre-test and at 1- and 2-year follow-ups.

**Results.** (1) Family functioning of high-anxious children receiving an intervention did not improve more, than family functioning of high-anxious children receiving no intervention; (2) Family functioning of high-anxious children receiving a parent-focused intervention did not improve more, than family functioning of high-anxious children receiving a child-focused intervention; (3) Family functioning of median-anxious children was not better at all measurements, than family functioning of high-anxious children.

**Conclusions.** This study found no direct relationship between preventive intervention of child anxiety and family functioning. Since including parents in child anxiety interventions and treatment does not appear to have added benefits for treatment outcomes of anxious children, it seems that the focus of interventions and treatment should be on the child, not on the parents.

**Keywords.** *cognitive behavioural therapy, family functioning, FAST, child anxiety*